

2 THESSALONIANS

INTRODUCTION

The second epistle followed shortly after the first epistle in B.C. 52 or 53.

The Christians in Thessalonica were still baby Christians when Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians. His first letter to them had given rise to further questions, and Paul is attempting to answer them in his second letter. There was circulating in the Thessalonian church a letter or report, purported to have come from Paul, which was inclined to disturb the Christians. This false report claimed that Christ had already come and had already gathered out the church to Himself, and that the world was then living in the judgments of the "day of the Lord." These people were being persecuted, as we saw in the first epistle. They were suffering for the gospel's sake, and it was easy for them to believe that they had entered the Great Tribulation period, and that all of the believers (not only the dead) had missed the Rapture. Paul attempts to allay their fears by writing this epistle and stating definitely that "our gathering together unto him" is yet future ([2Thess. 2:1](#)), and that "the day of the Lord" has certain forerunners which must first come: the apostasy and the "man of sin" must come first. Therefore they could reasonably believe they were not in the Great Tribulation.

Paul says that the outward organization of the professing church is going to go into total apostasy. In [Luke 18:8](#) the Lord asked, ". . . when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" The way the question is couched in the Greek it demands a negative answer. He will not find the faith on the earth when He comes again. The organized church will be in total apostasy. This is confirmed in the Book of Revelation. In the fourth chapter the church has been removed from the earth, and nothing is left but an empty shell of an organization that has a form of godliness but denies the power of it. That same organization is the great harlot in chapter 17 of Revelation, which is about as frightful a picture as you will find in the Word of God.

The Thessalonian believers thought they had entered the Great Tribulation period, and ever since that time folk who have gone through persecutions and tribulations have believed that they were in the Great Tribulation period. For example, during World War II at the time of the blitz in Britain, some of the British ministers who were conservative in their faith came to the conclusion that they had entered the Great Tribulation and that the church was going to go through it.

A good friend of mine, a preacher from England, believes that the church will go through the Tribulation. In fact, he believes the church is in it right now. Well, he is living in California now, and one day we were having lunch together with a mutual friend who was a layman, who had bought us big T-bone steaks. The subject of the church and the Tribulation came up, and he insisted that the church was in the Great Tribulation. To confirm his argument he said, "McGee, if you had been in Great Britain during the blitz, and night after night had gone down into the subways with your people, the members of your church, and practically every night one person would have a nervous breakdown because of the strain, and would have to be taken the next day to the country, you would share my belief." I said to him, "If I had been in Great Britain, and in the blitz as you

were, I am convinced that I would have thought as you did, Boy, this is the Great Tribulation! But after the war was over if I had come to the United States and was having lunch with a couple of friends and was eating a T-bone steak, I think I would pinch myself and ask myself, Is this really the Great Tribulation period? If this is the Tribulation, let's have more of it since it will mean more T-bone steaks." He looked at me and said in that British disdainful voice, "McGee, you are being ridiculous!" So I told him that I didn't think I was being ridiculous; I thought he was being ridiculous.

The description of the Tribulation in the Bible is much worse than anything that happened during World War II. This period has been so clearly identified by Christ that there is no reason for getting panicky and for being stampeded into an unwarranted position. Christ said that there is coming a small interval which will be blocked off by ". . . such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" ([Matt. 24:21](#)). Nothing like it has taken place before, and nothing like it will ever take place afterward.

While 1 Thessalonians emphasized the return of Christ for His church in what we call the "Rapture," 2 Thessalonians emphasizes the return of Christ to the earth the second time, when He returns in judgment and sets up His Kingdom here upon this earth. This is called the revelation. You see, at the Rapture, the emphasis is not upon His coming to earth, because He doesn't come to the earth. He makes it clear that "we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (see [1Thess. 4:17](#)). "Caught up" is the Greek word harpazo, meaning "to snatch away." We shall be snatched away or raptured to meet Christ in the air. However, the revelation of Christ is when He returns to the earth to set up His Kingdom. In the time gap between these two events will be the Great Tribulation period.

As we saw in 1 Thessalonians, the Rapture is not a subject of the Old Testament; that teaching does not appear in the Old Testament. The hope of the Old Testament saints was an earthly hope. They were looking for their Messiah to come and establish a kingdom here upon this earth -- which would be heaven upon earth. The expression "Kingdom of Heaven" means the reign of the heavens over the earth. That is putting it as simply as I know how. Some of the theologians really have made it complicated -- so complicated that I wonder if they are trying to establish some kind of a theory. But the Kingdom of Heaven which Jesus talked about is the reign of the heavens over the earth, because this earth is going to become a heaven when He is here.

Outline

I. Persecution of Believers Now; Judgment of Unbelievers Hereafter (at Christ's Coming), [2Thess. 1:1-12](#)

- A. Introduction, [2Thess. 1:1-2](#)
- B. Persecution of Believers and Fruits of It, [2Thess. 1:3-7](#)
- C. Judgment of Wicked at Christ's Coming, [2Thess. 1:8-12](#)

II. Program for World in Connection with Christ's Coming, [2Thess. 2:1-12](#)

- A. Rapture Occurs First, [2Thess. 2:1](#)
- B. Day of Lord Follows; Introduced by Total Apostasy and Appearance of Man of Sin, [2Thess. 2:2-5](#)

- C. Mystery of Lawlessness Working Today; Lawless One Restrained by Holy Spirit, [2Thess. 2:6-8](#)
- D. Lawless One to Appear in Great Tribulation Period, [2Thess. 2:9-12](#)

III. Practicality of Christ's Coming, [2Thess. 2:13](#) through [2Thess. 3:18](#)

- A. Believers Should Be Established in Word, [2Thess. 2:13-17](#)
- B. Believers Should Be Established in Walk, [2Thess. 3:1-7](#)
- C. Believers Should Be Established in Work, [2Thess. 3:8-18](#)

Chapter 1

THEME: Persecution of believers now and judgment of unbelievers hereafter (at Christ's coming)

Introduction (1:1-2)

Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ [[2Thess. 1:1](#)].

Paul's greeting is his usual friendly greeting to a church which is theologically and spiritually sound. Paul includes the greetings of Silas (a contraction of the name Silvanus) and Timothy (Timotheus is the Greek form). These three men had endured a great deal for the sake of the gospel. Paul and Silas were in the prison at Philippi. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had gone to Thessalonica together, and later Paul had to leave them. He waited for them in Athens and, when they did not come, he went on to Corinth where they finally met. It was at that time Paul wrote his first epistle to the Thessalonians to answer some of the questions that had come up since he had been there.

When Paul writes his second epistle, he identifies his two co-workers who are brethren with him. He would identify himself with men who, for us today, would be totally unknown had not Paul included them in these epistles. This reveals something of the character of Paul. A man who had been a proud young Pharisee has become a humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and a servant of His and an apostle of His.

"Unto the church of the Thessalonians." That was the local church in Thessalonica. Paul believed in the local church, and that church in Thessalonica was "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He probably did not mention the Holy Spirit because the Spirit was in the church in Thessalonica indwelling the believers. The indwelling Spirit enabled them to manifest the life of Christ and to walk worthy of the high calling of God. Their position, however, was in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. This means, my friend, that Paul taught the deity of Christ. There was no doubt in Paul's mind that Jesus Christ was God the Son.

In [John 10:27-29](#) the Lord Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." In this first verse you have the two hands of deity which belong to the Lord Jesus and God the Father. That is

where the church is positionally -- the Thessalonian church was there, and I hope your church is there. The important thing is not the name of your church. The important thing is that you and other true believers are in Christ Jesus, and that makes the local church very important. The Holy Spirit indwells true believers, and by His power they can manifest Christ in the local neighborhood, in the community, in the town, in the state, and in the world, showing forth the life of God. That is what Paul is saying to these believers in his introduction.

Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ [[2Thess. 1:2](#)].

Grace and peace are two important words in the gospel. Grace comes first. If you have experienced the grace of God, that means you have been saved. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)). When you come to God as a lost sinner, bringing nothing, and receiving everything from Him, then you have experienced the grace of God. He offers you salvation -- the gift of God is eternal life. You cannot work for a gift, and if you do, it ceases to be a gift and it becomes something you have earned. It becomes a payment. God is not patting you on the back because you are a nice Sunday school boy. Salvation is God offering you, a lost, hell-doomed sinner, eternal life if you trust Christ. That is grace.

"Peace" -- if you have experienced God's grace, then you know something about His peace. Peace is the world's softest pillow that you can sleep on at night. It is the peace that comes when you know that your sins are forgiven. Peace comes, not from some psychological gyrations you go through, or through the counsel of a psychiatrist, but it comes from a supernatural source -- from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"; it is supernatural. If you don't have it, you can have it, because it is the gift of God which is given to sinners who turn to Christ.

Persecution Of Believers And Fruits Of It (1:3-7)

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth [[2Thess. 1:3](#)].

The word charity in this verse is "love." In [verse 4](#) Paul speaks of patience and faith. In [verses 3](#) and 4 we have that little trinity that Paul uses: faith, love, and patience. These three words are abstract terms, but we must bring them out of the abstract into the concrete. Get them walking on the sidewalks today. This again is the "work of faith" which Paul mentioned in [1Thessalonians 1:3](#). Saving faith produces works. A saving faith will produce a love in the heart for God's children. My friend, if you are a child of God, you will have to love me whether or not you want to, and I'm going to have to love you. It is a wonderful arrangement!

In the next verse Paul picks up the third word, which he uses with "love" and "faith." It is "patience." This is not the patience of waiting in a traffic jam or waiting for a light to turn green. It is the patience that is willing to live for God and accept whatever He sends your way, knowing that all things do work together for good. It is the patience that has as its goal coming into God's presence someday. This enables you to get over the rough places

that come into your life. The life of a Christian reminds me of traveling over a highway. Many years ago I used to cross the country by automobile from Texas to California. There would be many places where a detour sign would put us on a rough old road. But along the way we would see a sign that read "5 miles to the double highway," and the rough road became a little bit smoother by knowing that we would hit the asphalt or the concrete in a little while. And many of us are on a detour in this life. The road is rough, and we are called upon to suffer. Well, if you have a good view of the future, it will give you the patience of hope -- a hope that looks way down yonder to the good smooth road coming up. And it may be closer than you think.

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet." The word meet means "proper" -- it is right and fitting for us to thank God for you.

"Because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." You cannot grow toward God without growing outward toward your brother. When you grow toward God in grace and knowledge and faith, you grow toward your brother in love.

And God must send us a little trouble because that is the discipline which produces patience in our lives. It enables us to look down into the future with hope.

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure [[2Thess. 1:4](#)].

"Tribulations" are afflictions. The church will not go through the Great Tribulation, but we will go through the little tribulation. We all will have trouble down here. If you are not having any troubles, then there must be something wrong with you, because the Lord disciplines His children.

Patience is an interesting word. The Greek word translated by the English word patience has the literal meaning of "standing under." It means to be placed under. A great many people try to get out from under the problems and difficulties. The person who is patient is able to stay under, and he keeps on carrying the load. He doesn't throw it off; he doesn't try to get rid of his responsibility.

These Thessalonian Christians had a real testimony in the Roman world of that day. (Thessalonica was a Roman colony, and people were going to and fro from that colony, so the word got out everywhere.) The patience and faith of these Christians were unshaken as they were enduring a great deal of trouble, persecutions, and afflictions.

Trouble is not something strange. The Word of God makes it clear that we are going to have trouble in this life. Peter expressed it like this: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" ([1Pet. 4:12](#)). Sometimes we hear Christians say, "I don't know why God let this happen to me. Nobody else has ever had to go through this." It is safe to say that such a statement is not true. Whatever you are going through, you have company. It is not a strange thing for suffering to come to us. Peter goes on to say, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" ([1Pet. 4:13](#)). Peter warns that Christians sometimes get

themselves into trouble. "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters" ([1Pet. 4:15](#)). A Christian can get himself in hot water because he talks too much -- talking about others. Or he can suffer persecution because he is dishonest. There is no advantage to that kind of suffering. That is not the discipline in life which will develop patience. That is simply getting what you have coming to you. Peter goes on, "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" ([1Pet. 4:16](#)). There is a difference between being disciplined to learn patience and the punishment of the wicked. God disciplines His children for their development, for their growth, that they might have patience and a hope for the future. We don't need to get too comfortable down here. When we do, we no longer have the hope before us of the Lord's return.

Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer [[2Thess. 1:5](#)].

Our suffering has nothing to do with salvation, but it sure prepares us for our eternal state. When you and I look back to this life on earth, maybe some of us will wish that we had had a little bit more discipline than we got!

While the judgment of the wicked begins with [verse 8](#), this is certainly the introduction to it.

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you [[2Thess. 1:6](#)].

When God judges, God is righteous in it. Paul asks the question: "Is there unrighteousness with God?" The answer is, Let it not be -- "God forbid" (see [Rom. 9:14](#)). Whatever God does is absolutely right. He can do no wrong. Sometimes we complain about the things that happen to us because we are ignorant; we do not understand God's ways. But God has a very definite purpose for all that He does. And God is righteous in sending the Great Tribulation. It is a judgment of sinners.

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [[2Thess. 1:7](#)].

The Lord Jesus is coming in judgment.

Judgment Of Wicked At Christ's Coming (1:8-12)

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power [[2Thess. 1:8-9](#)].

The Word of God actually says very little about heaven. One of the reasons is that it is so wonderful we could not comprehend it. And the Lord does not want us to get so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. He wants us to keep our eyes on our pathway down here, and I think He wants us to keep our noses to the grindstone much of the time. In

other words, He has a purpose for our lives on earth, and He wants us to fulfill that purpose.

Scripture not only says very little about heaven, it says less about the condition of the lost. It is so awful that the Holy Spirit has drawn a veil over it. There is nothing given to satisfy the morbid curiosity or the lust for revenge. When God judges, He does not do it in a vindictive manner. He does it in order to vindicate His righteousness and His holiness. There is nothing in the Scriptures to satisfy our curiosity about hell, but there is enough said to give us a warning. It does not mean that it is less real because so little is said. Actually, Christ Himself said more about hell than did anyone else. Hell is an awful reality. I am not going to speculate about it; I'm just quoting what is said right here: He is coming "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

Hell is ridiculed today, but that does not mean it doesn't exist. Our beliefs are sometimes only wishful thinking. For example, it was the popular notion that Hitler would not plunge Europe into a war and turn Europe into a holocaust of flaming fire. But he did. Chamberlain, the man with the umbrella, went over to meet with Hitler and Mussolini, and he came back saying that we would have peace in our time. Well, we didn't have peace, and we don't have peace in the world today. Also, many people thought that Japan would never attack America. Our government did not believe she would, and the liberal churches at that time were teaching pacifism. Well, whether they believed it or not, there was a vicious attack at Pearl Harbor.

Friend, we might as well face the fact that there is a hell. Christ is returning to this earth some day. First He will take His own out of the earth, and then His coming will be a terror to the wicked; it will be a judgment upon those who "know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" ([John 17:3](#)). Do you want to work for your salvation? Jesus said, ". . . This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" ([John 6:29](#)). That is what the Word of God teaches.

I know that it is not popular to talk about hell and judgment. Even the Christian testimonies that we hear and read are filled with I, I, I -- "I became successful in business. I saved my marriage. My personality changed." Nothing very much is said about the Lord Jesus. How many testimonies have you heard in which it is said, "I was a hell-doomed sinner going straight to hell, I was lost, and He saved me"? The important thing to say in a testimony is not what He has given you but from what He has delivered you. That was the whole purpose for the coming of our Savior. He came to redeem us! He didn't come to give us new personalities or to make us successful. He came to deliver us from hell! That's not popular to say. Folk don't like to hear it.

There are too few people today who are willing to confront folk with the fact that they are lost. Suppose you were asleep in a burning building, and a man rushed into that building to rescue you. He awakened you, picked you up, and carried you bodily out of that burning building. He liked you; so he made you his son. He brought you into his lovely home and gave you many wonderful gifts. Now if you had the opportunity to stand before

a group of people and tell about this man and express your appreciation in his presence, what would you thank him for? Would you thank him for making you his son? I hope you would. But wouldn't you really thank him most for the fact that he risked his life to save you out of a burning building? Nothing else would have mattered if he had not rescued you from a flaming death.

Now, my friend, the judgment of the lost is coming. If you want to stay in that class, you shall be judged. Somebody needs to tell you the facts, and I am telling them to you right now.

Again, who are the lost? They are those who (1) "know not God" and who (2) "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let me repeat [verse 9](#): "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day [[2Thess. 1:10](#)].

The coming of Christ to the earth in judgment will justify the believers who have put their trust in Him, and it will glorify the Savior.

Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ [[2Thess. 1:11-12](#)].

"That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you." If God has prospered you, made you a financial success, and you can glorify Christ, that's fine. But somehow I am more impressed by a little woman who has been flat on her back in a hospital most of her life -- yet has a radiant testimony for Christ. Certainly Christ is being glorified in her.

Chapter 2

THEME: The program for the world in connection with Christ's coming

Back in 1 Thessalonians, beginning at [verse 13](#) of chapter 4, we called attention to the rapture of the church; we also spoke of the Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation, and the coming of Christ in glory to this earth. In this epistle the emphasis is going to be on the Great Tribulation period, but we are also going to find one of the finest passages on the rapture of the church.

The Rapture Occurs First (2:1)

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him [[2Thess. 2:1](#)].

"Our gathering together unto him" is the rapture of the church. The first aspect of Christ's coming is in view in this verse. There is no judgment at this time.

The Day Of The Lord Follows The Rapture (2:2-5)

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand [[2Thess. 2:2](#)].

In many good Bibles with notes you will find the note in the margin -- if it has not already been changed in the text -- that this should read "the day of the Lord is at hand" rather than "the day of Christ is at hand." The Day of the Lord has no reference to the church. After the Rapture, the day of Christ, or the age of grace, comes to an end and the Day of the Lord begins. The Day of the Lord is a subject which is often mentioned in the Old Testament, whereas the Rapture is not. The Day of the Lord begins with night. Joel tells us it is darkness and not light. It is a time of judgment. It opens with night just like every Hebrew day opens: "the evening and the morning were the first day" ([Gen. 1:5](#), italics mine).

"Nor by word, nor by letter" -- apparently someone had been circulating a letter or an oral word among the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord had come. It is interesting that there is always a group of super-duper saints who seem to think they get direct information from the Lord. They don't think they need to study the Word of God; they imagine they get their information directly through dreams or visions or special revelations. Now, friend, I admit that it is much easier to pick up all your information in a telephone conversation than it is to go to school or take up the Bible and study it, but it won't be coming straight from God. So there was circulating in Thessalonica a word that had come to them, and it was a special "revelation," something that Brother Paul had not told them.

"Nor by letter" would indicate that a spurious letter had been circulating. Or perhaps someone simply said they had seen such a letter.

"Nor by letter as from us" would mean that they said the letter supposedly came from Paul, Timothy, and Silas.

The word they circulated was that "the day of the Lord is at hand." This had caused a problem with the Thessalonian believers, and we can see why. They were enduring persecution. Because they were having trouble, it was very easy for someone to say, "Well, this is the Great Tribulation that we are in. The Day of the Lord has come, and we are already in it."

The Day of the Lord is a technical phrase that speaks of the period beginning with the Great Tribulation and continuing through the Millennium. It is a day that begins with judgment. Joel describes the Day of the Lord in some detail in chapter 2 of his prophecy, and Peter quoted him on the Day of Pentecost. His listeners knew that there was a day coming when the Spirit of God would be poured out -- but it was the coming Day of the Lord of which they knew. In [Acts 2:20](#) Peter says, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Certainly that had not happened at Pentecost. At the crucifixion of Christ there had been an earthquake and darkness, but on the Day of Pentecost there was nothing like that at all. There was a rushing sound like a mighty wind, and it had the appearance of tongues of fire as it rested upon each of those present. There was no wind, but it sounded like a

hurricane when it hit the town, and it caused everybody to rush up to the temple area to see what had happened. Peter is saying that the Day of Pentecost was similar to the day Joel described: "You think these men are drunk? They are not; they are filled with the Holy Spirit." Because of Joel's prophecy, the orthodox Jews in that day believed there was a day coming when God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh -- but on the Day of Pentecost it was not poured out on all flesh. The Day of the Lord is yet future.

Peter refers to the Day of the Lord again in his epistle: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." We have already seen that for the church He will not come as a thief in the night (1Thess.. 5). The church is to be awake and waiting for Him. It is to the sleepy world that He will come as a thief in the night. Peter goes on to say, ". . . in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" ([2Pet. 3:10](#)). Again, this did not happen on the Day of Pentecost.

Another Scripture which shows that the Day of the Lord has no reference to the church is [Revelation 6:17](#): "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" That is not for the church. The church is to look for Him -- a Person -- to come, because we are identified with Him.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition [[2Thess. 2:3](#)].

"Let no man deceive you by any means." If we are not to be deceived, then let's listen to Paul.

"For that day shall not come." Which day? The Day of the Lord -- not the Rapture. The Day of the Lord shall not come except there be the fulfilling of two conditions: (1) "There come a falling away first" and (2) "that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." Both of these things must take place before the Day of the Lord can begin, and neither one of them has taken place as yet.

There must be "a falling away first." Many have interpreted this to mean the apostasy, and I agree that it does refer to that. But I think it means more than that, as a careful examination of the word will reveal. The Greek word that is here translated as "falling away" is apostasia. The root word actually means "departure or removal from."

Paul says that before the Day of the Lord begins there must first come a removing. There are two kinds of removing that are going to take place. First, the organized church will depart from the faith -- that is what we call apostasy. But there will be total apostasy when the Lord comes, and that cannot take place until the true church is removed. The Lord asked, ". . . when the Son of man cometh [to the earth], shall he find [the] faith . . . ?" ([Luke 18:8](#)). When He says "the faith," He means that body of truth which He left here. The answer to His question is no, He will not find the faith here when He returns. There will be total apostasy because of two things: (1) the organization of the church has departed from the faith -- it has apostatized and (2) there has been another departure, the departure of the true church from the earth. The departure of the true church leads into

the total apostatizing of the organized church. The Day of the Lord cannot begin -- nor the Great Tribulation period -- until the departure of the true church has taken place.

Paul is not going into detail about the rapture of the church because he has already written about that in his first epistle: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" ([1Thess. 4:16-17](#)). That is the departure, the removal, of the church.

The organized church which is left down here will totally depart from the faith. We see it pictured as the great harlot in [Revelation 17](#). The Laodicean church, which is the seventh and last church described in the Book of Revelation, is in sad condition. I think that is the period we are in right now. When the true believers are gone, it will get even worse. It will finally end in total apostasy.

From the viewpoint of the earth the removal of believers is a departure. From the viewpoint of heaven, it is a rapture, a snatching or catching up. I think the world is going to say at that time, "Oh, boy, they are gone!" They think that fellow McGee and other Bible teachers are a nuisance, and they will be glad when they are gone. The world will rejoice. They do not realize that it will be a sad day for them. They think they will be entering into the blessing of the Millennium, not realizing they are actually entering into the Great Tribulation period, which will be a time of trouble such as the world has never before seen.

Sometime ago Mrs. McGee and I were at the Los Angeles airport to take a morning flight to Florida. We always go early to have breakfast at the airport. While we were waiting, a big 747 was getting ready to go to the Hawaiian Islands. There was a fine-looking Marine Corps fellow there with his pretty wife and a precious little baby. But they looked so sad. A few minutes later when it came time to board the plane, they stood up. The father put his arms around them both, and they just wept. Then he picked up his bag and disappeared through the gate. It was a departure. It was an apostasia, a removal. The young wife picked up the baby and slowly walked back to the escalator, tears running down her face. My heart went out to her. Life would be hard for her now.

I couldn't help but think that that is the way it will be for the world. When the church departs, many people will be glad to see us go. The liberals will be glad to get rid of us. There will be rejoicing. But they do not realize how hard it will be for them. They are going to enter the Great Tribulation period.

The second thing which must happen is that the "man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." When he is revealed the Great Tribulation period has already begun. Here he is called "the man of sin." John calls him "the antichrist." John is the only one who uses that term, by the way. The Antichrist has about thirty different titles in the Bible. He is a subject of the Old Testament. He is going to be Satan's man. This is the man who will put the Roman Empire back together again, and he will finally become a world dictator. He is going to deceive the world. He could be in our midst today, but he won't be able to appear in power or reveal who he is until after the Great Tribulation period begins.

Paul tells us more about him --

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God [[2Thess. 2:4](#)].

One of his claims will be that he is God. In [Revelation 13](#) we find that the beast out of the sea (the Antichrist) brings together western Europe, and he will put it back together again. When he does this, he will show himself as God. The world will think that he is Christ. That is the big lie.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? [[2Thess. 2:5](#)].

Paul hadn't hesitated to talk about these things. Some say that a preacher shouldn't dwell on these topics. Well, Paul did. Paul says, "When I was with you, I told you about him."

Mystery Of Lawlessness Working Today, Restrained By The Holy Spirit (2:6-8)

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time [[2Thess. 2:6](#)].

What can withhold evil in the world? The only One I know who can do that is the Holy Spirit. Governments can't do it -- they are not doing it. The Roman Empire couldn't do it; it was an evil force itself.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way [[2Thess. 2:7](#)].

Let me give you a clearer translation of this verse: "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only he who now hinders will hinder, until he be taken out of the way."

"The mystery of lawlessness" had begun to work already in Paul's day, and it continues to work. The Lord Jesus gave a parable in [Matthew 13](#) which reveals the condition of the world today. These are the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, and they explain the condition of the world and of the church in the world today. The Word of God is being sown out in the field of the world, but an enemy has come in and has sown tares. The tares and the wheat are growing together -- the Word of God and lawlessness grow together today. The world is getting worse and, in a sense, the world is getting better, because I think the Word of God is going out more than it ever has in the history of the world. The doors are open -- the Word is growing, the wheat is growing. But the tares are growing also.

Lawlessness will continue to get worse and worse, but the Holy Spirit will not let Satan go all the way in this age. When the Holy Spirit will be removed, it will be like taking the stopper out of the bottle -- the liquid of lawlessness will pour out all over the world in that day.

When will the Holy Spirit be taken out? He will be taken out with the church. Won't the Holy Spirit be in the world during the Great Tribulation? Yes. Wasn't He in the world before Pentecost? He surely was. He was present in the days of the Old Testament, but

He was on a different mission. And He will be on a different mission after the church is removed. Now the Spirit of God is sealing us until the day of redemption when He will present us and deliver us to the Lord Jesus. If He didn't do that, we would never make it. After He does that, I believe He will come back to the earth to resume His former mission down here. But He will not hinder evil -- He will let the Devil have his day for a while. Believe me, I don't want to be on the earth when the Devil has it! It looks bad enough to me as it is today; so I don't want to be here when it is turned over to him.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming [[2Thess. 2:8](#)].

"That Wicked" -- the Antichrist, the Man of Sin -- will be a world dictator. Nobody can stop him. No power on earth -- only the coming of Christ will stop him. As God's people in Egypt were helpless and hopeless until God delivered them, so the believers during the Tribulation will be helpless under the power of the Antichrist until the Lord Jesus comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom. "The Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth," that is, the Word of God which is the two-edged sword that proceeds from His mouth shall consume the Antichrist. It was the Word of God that created this universe. All God had to do was to speak. God said, "Let there be light: and there was light" ([Gen. 1:3](#)). The Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. Today we have the Bible, which is the written Word of God. The written Word is about the living Word, and it is alive and potent. When the Lord Jesus returns, He comes as the living Word of God.

"And shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." "Brightness" is the Greek word *epiphaneia* or "epiphany" in English, and it refers to the shining forth of His coming. When the Lord Jesus came to Bethlehem, it was His first epiphany. [Titus 2:11](#) uses that word *epiphaneia* when it says, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (italics mine). That was the gracious appearing of His coming.

As George Macdonald put it:

"Thou cam'st, a little baby thing,
That made a woman cry."

When He comes again it will be another epiphany. He will take His church out of the world, and then He is coming to the earth to establish His Kingdom. His first coming had two episodes of coming, if you want to look at it that way. He came to Bethlehem as a little baby, and then later He began His ministry at the age of thirty years when He walked into the temple and cleansed it. His second coming also has two phases. He calls for His church to meet Him in the air, and then He comes down to the earth to establish His Kingdom. At that time the Antichrist shall be consumed and destroyed with the brightness of His coming.

Lawless One To Appear In Great Tribulation (2:9-12)

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders [[2Thess. 2:9](#)].

This is the Antichrist, Satan's man, the Man of Sin, the lawless one. He will come "after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

"Power" here is *dunamis* in the Greek. It means a physical power whose source is supernatural. He will be quite a healer and a miracle worker. I think he will be able to walk on water. I think he might be able to control the wind. Remember that Satan at one time let a wind destroy the sons and daughters of Job. I am always afraid when anyone tells me of someone who is performing miracles today, because the next miracle worker predicted by the Bible is the one whose coming is after the working of Satan. I am always afraid that miracle workers have not come from heaven. The Devil will send this man with power and signs and lying wonders. That is the reason it is so important for us to get our eyes off men and to get them on Christ, to walk by faith in Him.

"Signs" means tokens. They have the purpose of appealing to the understanding. This man will have signs which will appeal to the scientific world of that day as well as to politicians and the religious world. I am amazed how even today people are taken in by the phoniest kinds of things. Someone has asked me, "Why do you think that happens?" I believe the answer can be expressed like this, "Those who do not stand for something will fall for anything." People who are not rooted and grounded in the Word of God will fall for all kinds of signs.

"Lying wonders" will produce an effect upon observers. In that day, people all over the world will be talking about the Man of Sin, saying, "My, this world ruler we have is a great fellow. Look at what he can do!"

Who is it that will fall for his lying wonders? Those who would not believe the gospel --

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish;
because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be
saved [[2Thess. 2:10](#)].

He will do this "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." Why? -- "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." I do believe that the gospel is going to go out to the ends of the earth. It may even be the church that accomplishes this. I think it is penetrating pretty well today by radio into areas where individuals cannot go. But there will be those who hear and refuse to receive the truth.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they
should believe a lie [[2Thess. 2:11](#)].

God will let the world believe a lie. Why does He do that? Isn't that a little unfair? No, it is just like it was when God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Pharaoh wasn't weeping for the children of Israel, longing to let them go free, being held back from his good intentions by God! If you think that, you are entirely wrong. Pharaoh did not want to let them go, and what God did was to force him to make a stand and come to a decision. God forced him into a situation which revealed what was already in his heart. We see a lot of people pussy-footing around today. They won't take a stand for God. They won't listen to the gospel. They are closed to it. God graciously gives them His Word, but they don't want it. After they have heard the Word of God but have refused to accept it, God will send them

"strong delusion." Why? Because they would not receive the truth. Then they are open to believe the lie.

People who have stopped going to churches where they heard the gospel are wide open to the cults and the "isms" of our day. That is why so many of the cultists go around on Sunday morning, knocking at doors. They know that the weak people will not be in church on Sunday morning. They are not interested enough in the Word of God to be in church. The cults know that they can get those people, because if they will not receive the truth, they are open for anything else that comes along.

I have been simply amazed at some intelligent people who have sat in church, heard the gospel, rejected it, and then turned to the wildest cult imaginable. They will follow some individual who is absolutely a phony -- not giving out the Word of God at all. Why? Because God says that is the way it is: When people reject the truth, they will believe the lie.

God is separating the sheep from the goats. God uses the best way in the world to do it. If people will not receive the love of the truth, then God sends them a "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." What is the "lie"? The lie of Antichrist is that Jesus Christ is not the Lord, that He is not who He says He is. He will tell people that they are really smart in not becoming religious nuts who believe in Jesus. He'll have some good explanation for the departure of the saints from the earth at the Rapture and will congratulate the people on having waited to build a kingdom on earth with him. The people will believe him and will believe that Antichrist will bring them the Millennium. They will not realize that they are entering into the Great Tribulation. That is the lie, and people will believe it because they believed not the truth.

That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had
pleasure in unrighteousness [[2Thess. 2:12](#)].

God is going to judge those who have rejected the truth. I have said this many times, and I am going to say it again: If you can sit and read the Word of God in this book and continue to reject Jesus Christ, then you are wide open for anything that comes along to delude and deceive you. You will never be able to go into the presence of God and say, "I never heard the gospel." If you turn your back on the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are wide open for delusion and you are a subject for judgment. As a believer giving out the gospel, I am a savor of life to those that are saved and a savor of death to those that perish (see [2Cor. 2:15-16](#)). I have really put you out on a limb, because you cannot say you have never heard the gospel. You have heard it, and you have probably heard it in several different places. If you reject Jesus Christ, then I am the savor of death to you. If you accept Jesus Christ as your own Lord and Savior, then I am the savor of life to you.

Practicality Of Christ's Coming (2:9-12)

Now Paul moves into the practical side of this epistle. In the light of the knowledge of future events, the believer should live a life that demonstrates that he believes in the coming of Christ. Believing in the coming of Christ doesn't mean to run out and look up into the sky and say, "Oh, I wish Jesus would come!" That is just pious nonsense. It will be manifest in three different ways if a person believes in the coming of Christ: it will affect his attitude toward the Word, his walk, and his work.

Believers Should Be Established In The Word (2:13-17)

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ [[2Thess. 2:13-14](#)].

I believe these two verses give the total spectrum of salvation. In other words, they give you salvation "from Dan to Beer-sheba" -- all the way from the past, the present, and down into the future.

1. "Chosen you to salvation." This is so clearly taught in [Romans 8](#); "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. [Dr. R. A. Torrey used to say that this verse was a soft pillow for a tired heart. It surely is that.] For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" ([Rom. 8:28-31](#)).

That is exactly what Paul is writing here in 2 Thessalonians: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." That looks back to the past. All I know is what it says, and I believe it. Do you mean to tell me that God chose us before we even got here? Spurgeon used to put it something like this: "I am glad God chose me before I got here, because if He had waited until I got here He never would have chosen me." It simply means that you do not surprise God when you trust Christ. But there is another side of the coin: "Whosoever will may come." The "whosoever wills" are the chosen ones, and the "whosoever won'ts" are the nonelect. Jesus said, ". . . If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" ([John 7:37](#)). That is a legitimate offer of salvation -- a sincere, definite offer with no complications attached. If you don't come, the reason is not because you are not elected. Not at all. The reason you don't come is that you're not thirsty; that is, you don't think you need a Savior. If you are thirsty, then come to Christ.

2. "Through sanctification of the Spirit." "Chosen you to salvation" looked back to the past, and now sanctification by the Spirit looks to the present. You are sanctified both as to position and as to practice. When you accept Jesus Christ as your own Savior, you are in Christ -- that is positional sanctification; that is the past tense of salvation. Then there is also the practical side of sanctification which concerns your life. Through the Spirit of God you are to grow in grace.

3. "Belief of the truth." That means that a believer is going to study the Word of God. That is the way he is going to grow and develop.

4. "To the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is future. This refers to the Rapture. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" ([1John 3:2](#)). Then there is the statement in [Colossians 1:27](#), "To whom God

would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." That looks forward to the future. What a glorious, wonderful prospect we have before us!

We see that these two verses have given us the full spectrum of salvation: we have been saved, we are being saved, we shall be saved. It is all the work of God.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle [[2Thess. 2:15](#)].

Paul is referring to what he had taught them when he was with them. It is the Word which enables the believer to stand and be stable.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,

Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work [[2Thess. 2:16-17](#)].

The Lord Jesus Christ brings comfort and consolation to our hearts. He does this through His Word. That will establish us in every good word and work. The study of the Word of God will lead to the work of the Lord.

Not only will the Word of God "comfort" us, but it will also edify us. "Stablish you" means we are to be rooted and grounded in the Word of God so that we are not carried away by every wind of doctrine. Our minds and hearts will be centered on Him. That will keep us from going out after every fad of the day and reading every new book that comes off the press. Nor will we be running to little study courses here and there to be built up for the moment. We need to be established in the faith.

It is the Word of God then that will lead you to do the work of God. In chapter 3 we will see that believers should also be established in their walk and in their work down here. You see, it is rather deceitful (to yourself and others) to talk about how much you love the coming of the Lord if you do not study His Word. Then your belief does not manifest itself in your life and it doesn't make you work. If you really believe Christ is coming, you're going to be busy working for Him. You are going to give account to Him someday. If He is going to be here tomorrow, we want to be busy today. We shouldn't have our noses pressed against the window looking for Him to come, or to be always looking up into heaven for Him. Instead, we should be looking around doing the work of the Lord down here. That is the greatest proof that we believe in His coming.

Chapter 3

THEME: The practicality of Christ's coming

Chapter 2 concluded with the fact that believers should be established in the Word -- the Word of God. Paul spoke about God comforting our hearts and establishing us in every good word and work. This has to do with loyalty to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also Paul spoke in chapter 2, [verses 13-14](#), of the marvelous position we have in Christ. We are chosen -- "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through

sanctification of the Spirit." And we are called of God "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is heady stuff! It is exciting and thrilling.

Now here in chapter 3 Paul says that there are certain responsibilities that we have as believers. As Paul put it to the Ephesian believers, ". . . walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" ([Eph. 4:1](#)). Now Paul is saying the same thing to the Thessalonian believers.

Believers Should Be Established In Their Walk (3:1-7)

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith [[2Thess. 3:1-2](#)].

He is saying here that the Word of God enables the believer to walk before the wicked world. The Word establishes a believer in his walk.

"Finally, brethren" -- he is coming to the conclusion of his letter.

"Pray for us." Prayer is something that every believer can engage in. I do not think prayer is a gift of the Spirit. Prayer is something that all believers should do. Every work must have prayer behind it if it is to succeed. Every successful evangelist and preacher of the Word, every teacher of the Word who is being used of God, has people who are praying for him. Paul is asking the Thessalonians for prayer so that "the word of the Lord may have free course." Paul had a very unique ministry. He was a missionary. He was an evangelist as we think of evangelists today. Actually that word evangelist in the New Testament means "missionary." Also, he was a pastor and a teacher of the Word. He fulfilled all those offices, and he had fulfilled them all to the Thessalonians. He had led them to the Lord and taught them; now he is acting as their pastor in his letters. He is not only instructing them in the Word, but he is attempting to comfort them and to counsel them. One of the things he enjoins them to do is pray. "Pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you."

You cannot pray for Paul today, but you can pray for Vernon. I would appreciate your prayers that the Word of the Lord as I give it out may have free course and be glorified. The Word of God needs to be exalted today. Pray that people will exalt the Word of God in their own lives. It troubles me and it worries me to see that even those who claim to believe the Word of God give so little attention to it. Pray that if people profess to believe the Word of God, they will get into it and find out what it says.

My friend, let me urge you to pray for your pastor. Let me say something very carefully. I know what it is to be a pastor, and I know what it is to be a Bible teacher holding conferences. I want to say to you that it is a lot easier to go around and hold conferences than it is to be a pastor. A pastor has a great responsibility because, very frankly, he deals with a great many folk who are unreasonable. Paul asks prayer that he "may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men." Did you know that there are wicked persons in the church? A pastor needs to be delivered from such folk.

The work of an evangelist is like the work of an obstetrician. He delivers the little baby into the world, and that is quite an undertaking, of course. But then he turns over the little one to the pediatrician. He is the one who sees to it that his diet is right, that he is burped properly, that he gets his shots, and so forth. The pastor, you see, is the pediatrician. He is the one who must deal with cantankerous saints and baby Christians. That is quite a job. My heart goes out to the pastor.

When I go out to speak at conferences, I meet some wonderful pastors. The only churches I want to go to are the ones where the pastor is preaching and teaching the Word of God and stands for the things of God. On the other side of the coin, that is the only kind of man who will have me in his pulpit! Recently, as we left such a church, I said to my wife: "We have had a wonderful ministry here at this church for the week. I've been here just long enough -- I think these people are wonderful, and they think I am wonderful! I left before they got acquainted with me and I got acquainted with them. Also I think I helped the pastor; he tells me that I did. But he is the one who is carrying the burden and the load there. He is the one who has the problems. I can simply walk away from them." I think the work of an evangelist or of an itinerant Bible teacher, as some of us are, is easy compared to the work of the man who is the pastor.

Paul asked for prayer that he might be delivered from "unreasonable and wicked men." I find that the spreading of the gospel is hindered more by people in the church than by anything else. No liquor industry, no barroom, no gangster ring has ever attacked me -- at least I have never known about it. But I have had so-called saints in the churches attack me. As you know, in our churches we have the saints and the "ain'ts," and there are a lot of "ain'ts." They can give a pastor a rough time. It's too bad that we can't all settle down and give out the Word of God.

Now when he says, "For all men have not faith," that is really "the faith." All men do not have the faith. That is, they do not hold to the doctrines as the apostles taught them. The foundation of the church rests upon the doctrine which the apostles have given to the church. That is what we should teach and preach.

It is one thing to hold the truth of the coming of Christ, to love His appearing; but it is another thing to walk worthy of that great truth. This is what Paul is writing about to the Thessalonians. If we really love His appearing, we will prove it by our relationship to the Word of God and by our walk through this life.

But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil [[2Thess. 3:3](#)].

That is so wonderful! I have let Him down on several occasions, but He has never let me down. He is faithful. He is always faithful. Christians should hold tenaciously to this little verse. The Lord is faithful, and He will establish you.

Christians need to be established. Right now the home is in disarray, the church is in disarray, and the lives of believers are in disarray. We need to be established. How can you as a believer be established? By coming to the Word of God and letting it have its influence in your life. The Lord operates through His Word. The Word of God will keep

you from evil. Someone has said, "The Bible will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from the Bible."

And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you [[2Thess. 3:4](#)].

Christians are commanded to do certain things, and there are specific commandments for Christians. We saw that in Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians where he records twenty-two commandments in the fifth chapter. There are not only ten but twenty-two commandments which the believers are to do. The Lord Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (see [John 14:15](#)) and these are His commandments.

Paul had "confidence in the Lord touching" them. He committed them to the Lord with the confidence that they were doing and would continue doing the things which he commanded. He believed that this Thessalonian church which had a wonderful testimony would continue to maintain that testimony.

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ [[2Thess. 3:5](#)].

The believer is to walk in "the love of God." My friend, if you are walking today in the sunshine of His love, the love of God is shed abroad in your heart and you know He loves you. And you can manifest that love by the power of the Spirit, because only the Spirit of God can make God's love real to us. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. You can't naturally love every Tom, Dick, and Harry -- and I'm of the opinion God does not expect that of us. Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians that our love is to be in judgment, which implies that we should be careful about loving those around us. There are folk who will hurt us if we open our arms to them.

"Into the patient waiting for Christ." This does not mean that you are to argue about being premillennial or pretribulational or posttribulational or amillennial, but that you are to be patiently waiting for the coming of Christ. Oh, what wonderful verses these are!

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us [[2Thess. 3:6](#)].

"Now we command you, brethren" -- Paul doesn't beat around the bush!

The believer is not to walk with the "disorderly." I know men who insist that we should go into the barrooms, sit down with the drunkard and have a beer with him as we witness to him. Unfortunately, I know of a young lady who became an alcoholic by following that procedure. God says that we are to "withdraw" ourselves from the disorderly. Certainly we are to witness to them, but we are not to fraternize on their level.

God makes it very clear whom we are to follow --

For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you [[2Thess. 3:7](#)].

Birds of a feather flock together. You will be like the crowd you run around with. Believers need to be very careful about the company they keep and the people with whom they associate.

Believers Should Be Established In Their Work (3:8-18)

The Thessalonians were walking in a right relationship to the Lord Jesus, and they were being persecuted for it. Paul comforted them, instructed, and encouraged them. Now he lets them know that he also is undergoing persecution and difficulty. And, friend, if you stand for the Lord, it will cost you something.

We have seen that the believer is to be established in the Word of God. Then we have noted how important the walk of the believer is, and how his walk should be grounded in the Word. Now we come to the work of the believer, which is also very practical. This involves things in which we need to be engaged -- that the Word of God may have its way in our hearts and lives.

Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you [[2Thess. 3:8](#)].

"Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought" -- that is, for nothing; he paid for what he ate.

"But wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you." His practice was that he would not let anyone pay him for his missionary work among them. I think this applied especially to his first missionary journey. When he arrived in town as a missionary, there was no reservation for him at the local motel. There was no stipend given to him, no love offering taken for him the first time he was there. He was very careful about paying his own way. He mentions that to the Thessalonians and also to the Corinthians. When he was establishing churches he supported himself by tentmaking.

However, after the churches were established and Paul had come back to visit them a second and a third time, he did receive an offering from them. He makes it clear to the Galatians that they should give. He thanks the Philippians for their gift. He himself took an offering on his third missionary journey to be given to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Obviously, the great truth of the coming of Christ had not caused Paul to become some sort of a fanatic or to take some unreasonable position in relation to money matters.

In every age there are fanatical people. In the last century there were those who expected the return of Christ; so they sold their homes and property, wrapped themselves in white sheets and got on the top of the roof to wait for the Lord to come! There were several actions which identified them as fanatics. For example, why get on the roof? Couldn't the Lord draw a person into the air from the ground as easily as from a roof? If one needed to get up on a roof, then wouldn't a mountaintop be better? And then, why in the world would one need a white sheet? I think the Lord is going to furnish us with suitable coverings when we come into His presence. And why would they sell their property and turn it into money? Did they think they could take the money with them? You see, people can do some very peculiar, senseless things because they say they believe in the soon

coming of Christ. The fact is that there is no other doctrine in the Bible that will make you work harder or more sensibly for Christ. If you believe that He is coming, you will work for Him. You will be busy for the Lord in some phase of His work. You will be putting out a few seeds of the Word of God in the field of the world so that they might bring forth a harvest.

Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us [[2Thess. 3:9](#)].

Paul is saying that as an apostle who had led them to the Lord and established a church among them, he had the right, the authority, to claim an offering. However, he did not do this because he wanted to be an example to the believers in Thessalonica that they might not be led to some fanatical position.

A young couple who had been in my classes when I taught at a Bible institute were inclined toward fanaticism. They thought they were super-duper saints, way out ahead of everyone else. But their exam papers were graded Cs or Ds, because they didn't really know the Word, although they affected to be very spiritual. (Incidentally, I don't think a person can be truly spiritual and be ignorant of the Word of God.) They came to me after I had become a pastor in that city and said they wanted to go to the mission field. They attended the church I served although they were not members. I asked them if they had their financial support. They said no. I asked, "Do you mean that you are going to the mission field without support?" "Oh," they said, "we're going to trust the Lord." Well, I said, "It's nice to trust the Lord, but can't you trust Him to raise your support here? Must you wait until you get into the mission field to trust Him for support? Why don't you get under a reputable mission board and work with them? If the Lord has called you to go to the mission field, He will raise up support for you -- the Lord will lay your needs on the hearts of certain folk who will pray for you and support you financially." No, they didn't want to do it that way, they were just going to trust the Lord. Well, this young couple went out to the mission field, and there they became casualties. They had to be brought home with money that some friends raised to pay their passage. Since that time they have separated and are divorced. She is married again. I have heard that he has lost his faith altogether, although I doubt that he ever really had faith. Their behavior was foolish and fanatical.

Paul was making missionary work very practical. He supported himself by working with his hands, and he did it to be an example to the Thessalonian believers. He is going to make a point of this in the next verse.

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat [[2Thess. 3:10](#)].

A believer who is looking for the Lord to return is not a dreamer; he is a worker. No work -- no food. That is the rule laid down by the apostle. "If any would not work, neither should he eat."

It is amazing how fanatical people can get about these things. The dean of men at Moody Bible Institute told about an incident that happened about fifty years ago. Two young men roomed together who were other examples of those super-duper saints who thought they were completely sanctified. One day they didn't appear in the dining room for

breakfast or for lunch or for dinner; so the dean went up to see what was the problem. They were just sitting there, looking out into space. He asked them if they were sick. No, they weren't sick. "Then why haven't you come down for meals?" They said, "We're just trusting the Lord. We are waiting for Him to tell us whether we should go down to eat." "Are you hungry?" They admitted that they were hungry. "Don't you think that is one of the ways the Lord has of letting you know that you ought to go down to eat?" They said, "No, we are waiting for special revelation from Him, and we are not going to move until then." So the dean said to them, "I have news for you. You are going to move, but not down to the dining room. You are going to move out of school. You cannot stay here." There is no place for that kind of fanaticism.

Today we are seeing a kind of fanaticism in the area of prophecy. It is quite interesting that in this epistle which deals largely in prophecy, almost half of it is given over to that which is practical. Paul puts the emphasis on the practical side of the great truth of the coming of Christ for His church. It is one thing to get fanatical about prophecy; it is quite another thing to believe the prophetic truth and then have it meshed and geared into our living down here so that it becomes practical and working.

We are to work while we wait. A gardener for a large estate in northern Italy was conducting a visitor through the castle and the beautiful, well-groomed grounds. As the visitor had lunch with the gardener and his wife, he commended them for the beautiful way they were keeping the gardens. He asked, "By the way, when was the last time the owner was here?" "It was about ten years ago," the gardener said. The visitor asked, "Then why do you keep up the gardens in such an immaculate, lovely manner?" The gardener answered, "Because I'm expecting him to return." He persisted, "Is he coming next week?" The gardener replied, "I don't know when he is coming, but I am expecting him today." Although he didn't come that day, he was living in the light of the owner's imminent return. The gardener wasn't hanging over the gate, watching down the road to see whether his master was coming. He was in the garden, trimming, cutting, mowing, planting. He was busy. That is what Paul is talking about when he says we should be established in the work of the Lord in view of the fact that He is returning.

"If any would not work, neither should he eat." You see, the Thessalonians had a few fanatics who simply withdrew themselves and decided that they were going to spend all their time looking for the Lord's return. Paul writes, "Don't feed them. They have to go to work."

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly,
working not at all, but are busybodies [[2Thess. 3:11](#)].

Here we are told the situation. There were some who were not working at anything constructive. They were not interested in getting out the Word of God, but they were busy -- they were busybodies. They were really making a nuisance of themselves, and they were causing trouble in the church in Thessalonica. It takes just one bad apple to spoil the barrel; it takes just one little fly to spoil the ointment; and one fanatic in the church can affect the spiritual life of a great many people. That is the reason Paul had said before that they were to withdraw themselves from the ones who walk disorderly, and I'm sure he had the busybodies in mind. They were busy as termites and just as effective as termites in the church at Thessalonica.

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread [[2Thess. 3:12](#)].

This doesn't sound very spiritual, does it? It doesn't sound very theological. But it certainly is practical. It would solve a great many problems in the average church if the busybodies, the troublemakers, would work with quietness and do something constructive. It is interesting that the man who was the biggest troublemaker in any church that I served was the smallest contributor -- and I found that out by accident. The treasurer of the church was talking to me about the trouble this fellow had been, and I said, "Well, he is a man of means, and I suppose a very generous giver, and he naturally is interested in how his money is being spent." The treasurer looked at me and laughed. He said, "That man gives ten dollars a year for the Lord's work!" Believe me, he certainly gave us more than ten dollars worth of trouble! There must have been people like that in Thessalonica. Paul says that they were to quietly go to work and mind their own business.

But ye, brethren, be not weary in well-doing [[2Thess. 3:13](#)].

How wonderful this is! A believer who holds the blessed hope should not grow weary of working for the Lord. As Moody put it, "I get weary in the work, but not weary of the work."

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed [[2Thess. 3:14](#)].

People in the church ought to withdraw from troublemakers in the church. However, many people more or less court their favor, because they don't want those people to talk about them, knowing they have vicious tongues. But withdrawing from the gossips would be the best thing that could happen in many churches.

Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother [[2Thess. 3:15](#)].

An attempt should be made to win the wayward member.

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all [[2Thess. 3:16](#)].

Isn't this lovely!

The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write [[2Thess. 3:17](#)].

This is an epistle from Paul signed with his own hand.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen [[2Thess. 3:18](#)].

His letter ends with a benediction. It is the conclusion of a wonderful epistle which teaches that the knowledge of prophecy, rather than leading to fanaticism or laziness, brings peace to the heart.

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